HIGHLY COMMENDED
YEAR 11 AND 12 CATEGORY

Cerulean blue

Merilyn Nishitha, Swan Hill College

The battered sedan gave one last grumble and sank into silence. Heat shimmered off the metal— a blue drained of life, nothing like the cerulean the children would one day cling to in their memories. With a vicious kick, a man in a tattered shirt emerged, the sour stench of alcohol radiating from him as he cursed and slammed his boot against the wheel. The car did not respond. Perhaps, at last, the man had met something he could not force into obedience.

Maybe the vehicle had grown tired of the screams and fists that thundered through the night, followed by the quiet weeping that always stopped too quickly. Or perhaps it had given up being driven by a man who staggered to the local pub, downed glass after glass of colourless liquor, and retched until the stench clung to his clothes and everything he touched. He would stumble back into that house that no longer held colour - once vivid blue walls now washed out into the mottled shade of broken promises and regret.

Two pairs of vivid brown eyes surveyed the scene, waiting for the moment to escape the cruel glance of the man they knew as their father. Inside the gloom, pans and glassware clattered as a woman fell to the floor crying, her sobs seeping into the crevices of the house that had never truly been home. It might have been once, briefly filled with the happiness of a love that burned too brightly and died too quickly, leaving only ashes that tossed and turned in the wind.

Slowly, carefully, slim legs and tender arms clothed in charity shop fabric tiptoed down the path, hearts swelling dangerously with a flicker of hope as they squeezed through a small hole in the fence that barely held together.

And then they ran.

They ran until the dirt rose behind them in a whirlwind, until their lungs burned with heat and adrenaline. No one pursued them. No one stopped them. No one cared enough to try. Hand in hand, they didn't stop till the ocean stretched ahead, a vast cerulean sheet unfurling toward the horizon where it rose to meet its lover.

They collapsed beneath the shade of palm trees that rustled with the whims of the wind, whispering old tales. The sand was warm beneath them, clinging to their skin. The ocean hummed, a steady sound that drowned out every memory they wished to forget.

They sat together as the burning sun sank lower, ready to meet the ocean that had waited for it since dawn. For a few precious hours, they could pretend this peace was real – pretend they had no scars, no marks. There was just them – the summer breeze brushing their skin, the squall of gulls overhead, the taste of salt, the scent of warm sand, and the cerulean blaze of sky and ocean – a colour they would carry for the rest of their lives.

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